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Music and Feminism in the 21st Century

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ABSTRACT: This article surveys feminist music scholarship in the 21st century. It focuses on a set of key issues, problems, and sites of contestation that impact a diverse range of feminisms and musics: the rise of popular and postfeminisms, precaritization and work, trans feminisms, digital technology, and sexual assault and harassment. The discussion of each topic begins by examining the relevant scholarship in feminist theory and then proceeds to survey the music studies literature in this area. The article is thus structured to provide a toolkit that scholars and practitioners of any kind of music—and just about any kind of feminism—can apply in their own work and activism.

KEYWORDS: feminism, music, trans studies, technology, work, sexual assault and harassment

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When this journal's editors asked me to write an overview of the state of feminist music research in the twenty-first century, I felt both fortunate and overwhelmed that feminism, both in general and in relation to music scholarship, has evolved to the point that a comprehensive overview is impossible in anything less than an encyclopedia. Just as there are many kinds of music, there are many different kinds of feminism; in the past two decades music scholarship and activism has flourished, producing innumerable permutations of musics and feminisms. Since I was charged to write an article and not a multivolume series, a comprehensive account of music and feminism in the twenty-first century was off the table. I have chosen instead to highlight issues that I think will be most useful for scholars and students interested in learning more about the state of music and feminism today. This article surveys the most prominent and urgent issues in twenty-first century feminist scholarship and activism, and reviews how musicians, music writers, and music scholars have engaged with them (or not) with the aim of identifying ideas, concepts, and questions that readers can apply—with appropriate modifications—to their own areas of practice and expertise.

I begin with a discussion of evolving feminisms. First, I address two kinds of feminism that use the purported consensus that feminism's aims have been or ought to be achieved to obscure ongoing and intensifying patriarchal oppression: postfeminism, which argues feminism is obsolete because women are already equal to men, and popular feminism, wherein a "spectacularly visible" (Banet-Weiser 2018a, 154) feminism functions as a commodity and a brand. Then, I discuss a series of current issues in feminist scholarship and activism: precarious labor, trans studies and trans feminisms, digital technologies, and sexual assault and harassment. I chose these specific foci because they are having the most significant impact on what feminism even is, how it is practiced, and how music and music writing is produced and received.

I have chosen to focus on issues rather than figures, traditions, or genres, because these issues are relevant to musicians, music writers, and music scholars, regardless of their specialization or discipline. In this article, I focus on anglophone North American, European, and Australasian feminisms and musics as they are examined in popular music studies and musicology. Though the range of musics and music disciplines I discuss here is far from comprehensive and strongly shaped by my own areas of expertise, readers can apply the analyses of these issues (with appropriate modification) to their own areas of practice and expertise.

I have also chosen to follow a modified version of Sara Ahmed's policy of citing only writers who are not men (Ahmed 2017); instead of avoiding men entirely, I try to prioritize and center writing by non-white, non-cis-men authors. This sometimes means I avoid citing well-known work in order to spotlight equally if not more significant work by less established or famous scholars.

POPULAR AND POSTFEMINISM

As the twenty-first century progresses, the aims of liberal feminism are increasingly accepted and championed by mainstream institutions, but in ways that reinforce rather than erode patriarchy. Liberal feminism focuses on the individual economic and sexual empowerment of white, bourgeois women.¹ These are the foci of liberal feminism because liberalism imagines personhood as private property and sexual access to women's bodies as a property right (Mills and Pateman 2007; Pateman 1988). Liberal feminism thus seeks to grant women ownership of property, including the sexual property in their bodies, that marriage contracts and rape culture traditionally reserve for men.² This doesn't change any of the underlying structures that support patriarchy (such as liberal notions of personhood and private property); it just conditionally and instrumentally grants a few women full liberal personhood as proof that sexism is over (when in fact it isn't over and is often worse). For example, white Western women's supposed empowerment is used as an excuse to further oppress non-white, non-Western people—including women—by punishing them for their supposedly exceptional misogyny.

In the anglophone West, there are two main variations of this co-optation of liberal feminism: postfeminism, which argues that the aims of feminism are accomplished and feminism itself is obsolete, and popular feminism, which argues that feminism and its aims are and ought to be widely accepted. As political theorist Christina Beltran explains, post-identity movements like postfeminism are grounded in the assumption that we have “collectively moved beyond prejudice and inequality and now live in a ‘post-feminist’ and ‘postracial’ era with institutions that are now fundamentally fair and accessible” (2014, 138). In this context, empowerment and success effectively become new gender norms that women are expected to meet. Under postfeminism,

a selection of (mostly liberal) feminist values and ideals appear to be inscribed within a more profound and determined attempt, undertaken by an array of political and cultural forces, to re-shape notions of womanhood to fit with new or emerging (neo-) social and economic arrangements. (McRobbie 2007, 721)

Facebook executive Sheryl Sandberg's book *Lean In* (Sandberg and Scovell 2013) and Ivanka Trump's advocacy of paid family leave and equal pay for women are some of the more well-known examples of this sort of postfeminism, which celebrates women who “have it all”—career, family, education, traditionally feminine physical beauty, and so on—without calling into question underlying structures of exploitation like the gendered, racialized division between productive and reproductive labor or the whiteness and cis-centrism of feminine beauty norms. Thus, as Angela McRobbie puts it, postfeminism is dedicated to “the re-making of social divisions, along a more emphatic axis of gender” (2007, 727). Women's empowerment as a liberal individual intensifies the underlying patriarchal gender system.

One of the main ways postfeminism intensifies patriarchy is by making feminism something passé, old-fashioned, and even taboo. The logic goes something like this: because (liberal white) feminism's aims have been accomplished, women are equal, so feminism is no longer necessary. In this context of supposed gender equality, feminist advocacy counts as a kind of chauvinism, a preferencing of women over and above men. Because “feminist and antiracist critique are heard as old-fashioned, as based on identity categories that we are assumed to be over,” people that continue to speak about patriarchy “will be judged as doing identity politics...because we are sore” (Ahmed 2017, 155–156); that is, because they are being unreasonably sensitive or have an axe to grind.

In music scholarship, this type of postfeminism is most evident in the absence of explicitly feminist work in flagship journals, such as the *Journal of the Society for American Music* or the *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, or Oxford University Press, a leading publisher of monographs in musicology, ethnomusicology, and other areas of music studies. All of these venues publish research influenced by feminism, such as *Gender and Rock* (Kearney 2017) or *How It Feels To Be Free: Black Women Entertainers in the Civil Rights Movement*

(Feldstein 2013). There is plenty of scholarship that does the things one would typically attribute to feminist scholarship: women are taken seriously as artists worthy of scholarly study and gender is an accepted framework for scholarly analysis. But the words *feminism* or *feminist* are almost entirely absent: nobody is actually calling this work *feminist*. For example, Oxford University Press's music list published no books with the word *feminist* in the title or subtitle in 2018. Similarly, an October 2018 search of their website for *feminis**, which would pull up both *feminism* and *feminist*, produced two results. In the program for the 2018 American Musicological Society (AMS)/Society for Music Theory (SMT) meeting, *feminist* appears only in Bonnie Gordon's talk in the AMS Committee on Women and Gender session (AMS and SMT meeting, 2018). *Music Theory Online*, the online journal for the Society for Music Theory, has a handful of articles with *feminism* or *feminist* in the title, including two from 2017 (Sterbenz 2017; Luong 2017). Searching these journals, conference programs, and book lists, it appears as if *feminism* was a thing that happened in music scholarship in the 1990s, opened doors for research on women artists and so-called "women's issues" (like sexual violence), and is thus no longer necessary and perhaps a sign of un-scholarly bias in favor of women.³

In her 2016 article "Twice Erased: The Silencing of Feminisms in *Her Noise*," Lina Džuverović identifies this postfeminist dynamic as a curatorial strategy:

What is perhaps most difficult to understand is our avoidance of the term "feminism." It does not appear in the introductory curatorial essay in the *Her Noise* catalog written by the two curators, nor in any other written material, nor in interviews we conducted for the *Her Noise* Archive.... We thought of *Her Noise* as "postfeminist," believing that by curating an exhibition of sound-based work by women, yet not articulating it as a feminist project, we were going beyond feminism, going one step farther, thus avoiding the alienation from the visual arts establishment that an outwardly feminist project, at that moment, would have brought about. (Džuverović 2016, 90)

Though the mission of *Her Noise*—curating and promoting the work of women artists in a highly male-dominated field—is straightforwardly feminist, its leaders and the journalists covering the project consciously and explicitly refused to call it or themselves feminist because such labeling would have impeded their access to elite artworld spaces and resources. My research demonstrates that the same dynamic appears in music scholarship: projects informed by liberal feminist values are acceptable, but explicit commitments to feminism impede one's access to elite scholarly institutions, such as publication in flagship venues.

However, explicit references to feminism are significantly more common in the titles of articles in journals dedicated to popular music. Prior to the beginning of my co-editorship of the *Journal of Popular Music Studies* (*JPMS*) in July 2018, the journal published at least eleven articles with *feminism* or *feminist* in the title. *Popular Music and Society* had seven hits for *feminism* and *feminist*, whereas *Popular Music* was more reflective of general music journals, with one hit each for *feminism* and *feminist* in the title.

Popular music studies is a broadly interdisciplinary field that includes but is not limited to musicology, music theory, and ethnomusicology, so this is perhaps one reason it publishes more articles that are explicitly feminist. My immediate predecessor as *JPMS* co-editor, Diane Pecknold, is appointed in a Women's and Gender Studies department, so this is likely also a contributing factor to what appears to be *JPMS*'s comparatively disproportionate commitment to feminism. But this would not explain why *Popular Music and Society*'s numbers are more similar to *JPMS*'s than the other music journals I surveyed. Popular music's feminized status among musics helps explain this. As scholars such as Susan Cook have argued (2001), popular music is commonly devalued in the same way that women and girls are devalued: through association with feminized and feminizing traits, like superficiality and embodiment. From a certain vantage, it appears as though popular music's low status rubs off on popular music studies, thus making popular music studies more welcoming of feminist research precisely

because it is not a hyper-elite scholarly space that must shield itself from the deleterious effects of feminism and feminists in order to protect that elite status.

Due to PopCon (a conference that includes both academics and music journalists), the neoliberal university's imperative for academics to "engage" the public by publishing in non-academic venues, and the field's object of study (pop culture), scholarship in popular music studies is very attuned to developments in popular culture. However, in other respects, popular music studies, precisely because it centers the popular and popular culture, gains its value and status in other terms—terms indebted to popular feminism rather than postfeminism.

Popular feminism is the "culture-wide circulation and embrace of feminism" made possible by the "economy of visibility" (Banet-Weiser 2018b, 3) supported by 2010s media. Like its post-feminist cousin, popular feminism "insist[s] on a universal definition of 'equality' between men and women as its key definition" (Banet-Weiser 2018b, 13). Popular feminism transforms liberal (white) feminism's commitments to individual empowerment into commodities to be consumed and brand identities to adopt. In other words, popular feminism marketizes feminist practice and ideology. For this reason, popular feminism is deeply invested in appearing "accommodating...friendly, [and] safe" (Banet-Weiser 2018b, 15): popular feminism is something everybody, including men, wants to consume and identify with.

There are literally countless examples of popular feminism. It drives advertising campaigns, the most (in)famous of which is the Dove Real Beauty campaign, which uses body positivity to sell soap. There are feminist clothing brands, such as Wildfang; there's a huge feminist media ecology, ranging from publications like *The Cut* and *Jezebel* to podcasts like Girlboss Radio, to streaming service playlists like Apple Music's "Essential Feminism," to girl-power movies like *Ocean's 8* and the *Ghostbusters* remake; feminism is even used to promote club nights in London (Students' Union, University College London 2015) and Auckland (Under the Radar n.d.), and certainly other places too. Emphasizing the participation in mass-mediated spectacle over other forms of activism, the 2017 Women's March and #MeToo are also examples of popular feminism. All these varied practices share the same underlying logic, which is what makes them versions of popular feminism. As Sarah Banet-Weiser explains, in popular feminism's underlying logic,

seeing and hearing a safely affirmative feminism in spectacularly visible ways often eclipses a feminist critique of structure....The visibility of popular feminism, where examples appear on television, in film, on social media, and on bodies, is important, but it often stops there, as if seeing or purchasing feminism is the same thing as changing patriarchal structures. (Banet-Weiser 2018b, 5)

Spectacle is key: feminism is performed as ethical consumption and personal branding. Like the broader neo/liberalisms in which it participates, popular feminism focuses exclusively on individual behavior and occludes institutional and structural oppression. This is because, at the structural level, popular feminism isn't about feminism. Even though individual participants may have deeply felt commitments to feminism, at the structural level popular feminism re-trains people to become the kinds of subjects that neoliberal white supremacist capitalist patriarchy needs them to be. For men, this means demonstrating the very capacity to adapt and reform itself: explicit and spectacular feminist performance shows that you've moved past toxic masculinity. For women and other non-men, this includes self-ownership (rather than objectification) and the capacity to transform damage into a resource (that is, *resilience*). Thus, popular feminism is a perfectly fine gateway drug leading people to more hardcore habits—a stage in one's nascent feminist politics and practice—but it is insufficient and counterproductive to stop at this gateway.

Because spectacle is central to popular feminism and popular music is a multimedia art form that crosses music, video, television, social media, photography, and live performance (to name just a few), popular music has been central to the development and articulation of popular feminism. As Banet-Weiser argues, "a key signifying

moment in popular feminism, for many girls and women, was when Beyoncé performed at the MTV Video Music Awards in 2014 with the word ‘feminist’ lit up behind her” (Banet-Weiser 2018b, 7). This performance of material from her 2013 self-titled visual album was a touchstone for both popular feminism in general and in pop music specifically.

Feminism swept the English-language pop charts in 2014. Not only was there more music by white women on nominally feminist themes, but this music also topped the Billboard Hot 100 for the last four months of the year as Meghan Trainor’s anthem to body positivity “All About That Bass” traded the number one spot back and forth with two Taylor Swift songs (Billboard n.d.). Their run was a bit shorter atop the UK charts; Trainor’s song hit the number one spot on the BBC singles chart on October 5, 2014, and stayed there for a month while Swift’s “Shake It Off” duelled with Jesse J and Ed Sheeran for the number 2 or 3 slots (Official Charts 2014). In addition to Trainor’s and Swift’s work from that era, there were plenty of other empowerment songs, such as Demi Lovato’s “Confident” (whose cover mirrors the famous “We Can Do It!” Rosie the Riveter poster), Nicki Minaj’s “Anaconda” (a feminist reworking of Sir Mix-A-Lot’s “Baby Got Back”), and feminist songs by men, such as Usher’s “I Don’t Mind” (which is about him being cool that his girlfriend is a sex worker) or Fetty Wap’s “Trap Queen.”⁴

These songs are some of the most well-known hits from the first wave of pop chart popular feminism, which ran from the release of Beyoncé’s self-titled visual album at the end of 2013 and peaked with her release of *Lemonade* in 2016. Katy Perry’s 2017 album *Witness*, which debuted atop the Billboard album chart but failed to stay there or to produce any #1 singles, was widely received as an attempt to “see what kind of social justice event or activity [Perry] can insert their brand into” (McDonald 2017). The skeptical reception and comparatively poor performance of the album marks a shift in pop chart popular feminism: as 2017 wore on, audiences still expected women artists to perform the spectacle of empowerment, but they ceased to reward them for it. Writing in *Noisey* in 2015, Emma Garland argued that “whether a music video by a female artist is feminist or not has since become the primary yardstick we use to determine its value.” However, as critics Maura Johnston (2018) and Lindsey Zoladz (2018) have shown, there is a “disconnect between the message of female empowerment and the reality of male dominance.” Johnston notes that while the 2018 “Grammy ceremony centered on Kesha, Janelle Monáe, and other women who raised their voices (and wore white roses) in support of #MeToo and Time’s Up, the night’s winners list told a different story. Of the eight awards presented during the telecast, only one—Best New Artist—was given to a woman, Alessia Cara” (Johnston 2018). Similarly, Zoladz argues that “2018 has been the year of the benevolent-yet-patronizing women’s empowerment anthem, as imagined by men,” who “commodify the idea of ‘strong women’ as an appealing marketing aesthetic rather than a complicated, lived experience” (Zoladz 2018). The spectacle of women’s empowerment has become a gimmick men artists use to appeal to audiences interested in ethical, feminist consumption. That’s textbook popular feminism.

Popular feminism hit music criticism a full decade before it appeared in the charts. Poptimism is the idea that musics that are traditionally dismissed for failing to reflect either the tastes of white cishetero men or the privileges and features stereotypically associated with them (such as complexity, virtuosity, seriousness, etc.) are just as aesthetically valuable and worthy of critical attention as the musics conventionally thought to speak to that audience and embody these values, such as rock.⁵ Poptimism emerged in the early 2000s out of two overlapping trends from the 1990s: third-wave feminism, which included a revaluation of things traditionally devalued for their femininity (e.g., knitting, crafting, and the word “girl” itself), and “omnivorous consumption,” in which elite musical taste shifts from valuing exclusivity to diversity, mirroring the broader institutionalization of multiculturalism, diversity, and so on (James 2017a, 2018c; Keenan 2014; Peterson and Kern 1996). Poptimism is what happens when you apply these various rehabilitations of traditionally excluded identities to music. As scholars such as Susan Cook and I have argued (Cook 2001; James 2010, 2013), popular music is thoroughly feminized: it exhibits all the things stereotypically attributed to women and femininity,

such as superficiality, association with the body over the mind, simplicity and deficient mastery, formulaic obedience, and so on. Theodor Adorno associates pop music with stereotypical femininity and feminine bodies, and uses those associations as a primary justification—if not *the* justification—for his infamous arguments about its low status (James 2010).

So, on the one hand, popmusic's revaluation of musics traditionally devalued for their association with women, girls, and femininity does important work in recalibrating aesthetic values and tastes to be more inclusive. However, in a context where the spectacle of affirmative feminism often eclipses a structural critique of patriarchy, popmusic—like popular feminism in general—reigns in the progressive potential of feminism's politics by subordinating them to capitalist demands. By the end of the 2010s, popular feminism had made it possible for the revolutionary potential of post-9/11 popmusic to be co-opted by the record industry and used as a way to sell records and brand artists. As I argued in my 2018 article "Poptimism and Popular Feminism," nowadays "poptimism works more or less like popular feminism: it turns the revaluation of things traditionally devalued because of their femininity into a way to make money" (2018c). To respond to this, feminist music scholars and critics need an analytic that aims at more than including maligned genres and people in elite institutions (like the record charts, year-end lists, or the Grammys) and must foreground patriarchy, white supremacy, and capitalism as structures. When they aim to create ways of relating to music and one another that don't reproduce the values and practices that grant elite institutions their elite status, such analytics can also help us think critically about the precaritization that runs across creative and media industries and the academy, i.e., the precaritization that affects us as critics and scholars.

Though pop music and the popular media are popular feminism's native territory, popular feminism manifests in scholarship about all kinds of music. Alyxandra Vesey's study of "citational feminism" among women rock musicians is one of the clearest examples of such scholarship on popular feminism in pop music (Vesey 2018).⁶ For the musicians Vesey studies, consumption—the consumption of clothing brands—serves as a model of feminist practice, which these musicians then in turn leverage as part of their brand image. Sally McArthur's study of the Australian new music scene identifies a classic postfeminist dynamic wherein the nominally improved visibility and presence of women occurs amid intensifying structural oppression and exclusion (McArthur 2014). As both Vesey's and McArthur's research demonstrates, popular feminism stops at the level of spectacle and avoids more systematic action or critique. Though such spectacular individual performance of feminism can be helpful in consciousness-raising, if it is treated as the main or only kind of feminist scholarly practice it actually helps hide ongoing and intensified patriarchal structures behind superficial evidence of reform.

Fortunately, there is plenty of research that studies and critiques patriarchal structures in music. For example, Rebecca Lentjes's analysis of the way women composers are treated and discussed in the so-called "new music" scene identifies the textbook popular feminist dynamic of a spectacular economy of "virtue-signaling," underwritten by ongoing patriarchal oppression (Lentjes 2018a). Matthew Morrison's work on "Blacksound" uses black feminist theory to show how spectacular performances of racial blackness derived from minstrelsy "structur[e]...our (post)modern economies of popular entertainment and identity" (Morrison 2017, 13), economies which continue to be white supremacist and patriarchal. Scholars such as Katherine McKittrick, Alexander Weheliye, and Sidney O'Neal have used poetry and poetics to both study the ways patriarchal racial capitalism shapes musical structures and to practice alternative, less oppressive aesthetics (McKittrick and Weheliye 2017; O'Neal 2017).

As Ashon Crawley stresses, such new "aesthetic practices cannot be owned but only collectively produced, cannot be property but must be given away in order to constitute community" (Crawley 2017, 5). To explain how such a practice might work, Crawley cites the difference between Nina Simone's use of Billie Holiday's "Strange Fruit" and conventional scholarly approaches to black women's cultural productions. These conventional approaches are, Crawley argues, grounded in the "theological-philosophical conception of enclosure" (Crawley 2017, 65). Enclosure is the process by which laboring upon supposedly "natural" or unimproved material trans-

forms it into private property; it is the logic that the British used to colonize the US and Australia, among other places.⁷ Scholars practice enclosure when they treat pop culture source material as intellectually “natural” or unimproved material that, through their scholarly labor, becomes the private property of an individual scholar or academic discipline. This labor marks scholarship as categorically different (Crawley 2017, 64) from the material the scholar analyzes; ideas are categorically different when treated as “purely different from—through excluding—other thought” (Crawley 2017, 11; see also note 17). For example, explaining how Angela Davis’s study of Billie Holiday “counts” as philosophy (the field in which Davis has her Ph.D.), one labors upon what appears to be philosophically unimproved material in order to transform it into something that legitimately belongs to the field of philosophy because it adheres to the norms of philosophy and philosophy alone (Dotson 2012). In contrast to this practice of categorical differentiation, Nina Simone’s cover of Holiday’s “Strange Fruit” marks diacritical differences from Holiday’s original—differences that do not exclude but rather create an antiphonal relation between source and analysis (the analysis here being Simone’s cover). As Crawley explains:

Such difference—in timing, in increases and decreases of volume, in key signature—endures throughout both performances, they are announced through their difference from one another....The social experiment of utilizing the same song and sound produces inflection, accent, and most importantly, critical distance from other performances....[W]hat such distance emphatically illustrates is that even the ‘original’ version is one produced by critical distancing. The originary is irreducibly, but not categorically, different. (Crawley 2017, 63–4)

Creating diacritical differences between her performance and Holiday’s, Simone places herself and her work in antiphonal relation with Holiday and her work. This is one example of aesthetics that reject capitalist (and white supremacist, patriarchal) logics. Such examples are crucial in helping feminist scholars navigate a world where feminist consciousness-raising and representational politics have been co-opted by capitalism (that’s what popular feminism is). The challenge for us moving forward is to practice feminist methods and feminist politics that help us relate to music and to one another in ways that mitigate or avoid the oppressive structures popular feminism feeds and obscures.⁸

One final point about popular feminism: Banet-Weiser emphasizes that it exists in a media ecology that also supports its opposite: popular misogyny. Like popular feminism, popular misogyny is primarily about spectacle and individual performance. As Banet-Weiser explains, “misogyny, once a social formation that was expressed primarily in enclosures (home, locker room, board room, etc.) now increases via the connection, circulation, publicness, networks, and communication across and through those enclosures” (Banet-Weiser 2018b, 5). The example of popular misogyny that music scholars are most likely to have encountered is Norman Lebrecht’s website “Slipped Disc,” which frequently features research on music and social justice for the sole purpose of giving space for readers to pile racist, sexist vitriol on that research in the comments (Hein 2018). The site has been referred to as “the music Breitbart” (see, for example, Power 2018).⁹ Both the website and its presence on social media platforms such as Twitter are perfect illustrations of how misogyny functions as networked spectacle.

Postfeminism and popular feminism are nominally invested in the aims of liberal (white) feminism, such as individual empowerment and self-ownership. However, because liberal feminism is incapable of addressing patriarchy as a system that works at the structural and institutional level, successfully realizing liberal feminism’s goals can’t and won’t fix patriarchy: it just grants otherwise privileged women access to some of the privileges patriarchy traditionally reserves for men. Fortunately, there are plenty of other feminisms for feminist music scholars to use in our work. Such feminisms focus on structures and institutions (such as underlying aesthetic values) and understand liberation to be a collective project that begins from and amplifies our interdependencies.¹⁰

PRECARITIZATION AND WORK

In the previous section, I mentioned that both music critics writing for the popular press and music scholars working in academia are facing the structural reorganization of their industries: full-time employment is an increasingly rare phenomenon as both the popular press and academia rely on part-time, contract labor that is massively undercompensated, has few if any benefits, and no job security. The International Labor Relations Forum (ILRF) defines “precarious work” as “contract and temporary work” where “workers are subject to unstable employment, lower wages and more dangerous working conditions. They rarely receive social benefits and are often denied the right to join a union” (ILRF 2019). Often referred to as “the gig economy,” (De Stefano 2016; Friedman 2014), precarious work generalizes the instability commonly faced by gigging musicians to all sectors of the workforce. Much in the same way that management literature commonly takes jazz improvisation as a metaphor for entrepreneurship (Chapman 2018), academic and popular business literature often takes gigging musicians as romanticized ideal gig economy workers, the glamor of the fantasized musician’s life obscuring the harsh realities of contemporary labor conditions (Howard 2018; Kubacki and Croft 2011; Meyerson 2018; Pendergrast 2003; Rouch 2018; Woroncowicz 2016). This is a feminist issue both because it is at its core a sweeping revision of the Fordist labor relation, to which the single-income nuclear family is central (Cooper 2017) and because precaritization disproportionately affects women, especially women of color (Young 2010).

Because precaritization affects academics, writers, and musicians alike, it is an important point of solidarity and cross-industry organizing. For example, Paula Harper has argued that academic conferences such as those held by the US Branch of the International Association for the Study of Popular Music (IASPM) ought to include opportunities for labor organizing (see Harper’s remarks in James 2019a). According to Harper, because there are fewer and fewer full-time, tenure-track academic jobs available to graduate students and early career scholars, such organizing is at least as important for these groups as other networking, mentoring, and professionalization programs. And what hurts faculty hurts students too. Research by Lucy Vágnerová and Luis García Molina has shown that the precaritization of academic labor in music departments negatively impacts undergraduate music curricula. Although shifting demographics and political sentiments among undergraduates have led to increased demand for classes and curricula that do not center the Western art music canon, “conservative curricula are kept in place by insulating the growing pool of contingent labor from impactful curricular work” (Vágnerová and García Molina 2018, 106). The majority of teaching in higher education is performed by contingent faculty; however, such faculty are commonly forbidden from serving on curriculum committees. Such service is neither compensated nor rewarded, thus creating a strong disincentive for already severely underpaid faculty to contribute ever more undercompensated labor. Because groups traditionally underrepresented in both the canon and in the profession are disproportionately over-represented among contingent faculty (Flaherty 2016), their inability to contribute to curricular decisions means that those decisions continue to be made by people from groups traditionally overrepresented in the field. In this way, the precaritization of academic labor directly impacts faculty’s ability to mitigate the impact of patriarchy and other intersecting systems of domination on curricula. The precaritization of academic labor is thus a feminist issue because it negatively impacts faculty and students’ ability to practice feminist ideals, politics, and pedagogies.

There is a growing literature on the impact of precaritization and post-Fordist labor arrangements on musicians and the music industry. For example, Andrea Moore and Will Robin studied the impact of the gig economy on the new music scene (Moore 2016; Robin 2018), and Jeremy Wade Morris studied its impact on pop artists and fans (Morris 2013). There is also a growing body of literature that uses feminist critiques of work, especially post-Fordist work relations, to study the performance of musical labor. Emily Lordi identifies a shift in the attitude toward work displayed by Beyoncé Knowles. Though her early releases often glorified hard work as empowering, beginning with her 2013 self-titled album, Knowles’s artistic output “advanc[es] an aesthetic of spontaneity and imperfection that rejects the incessant labor that neoliberalism demands and that her own

oeuvre had long celebrated” and “imagines the power of manifold forms of work to challenge the system that requires women of color to hustle to survive in the first place” (Lordi 2017, 134). Kemi Adeyemi identifies a different coping strategy in the work of contemporary rappers such as Future and Schoolboy Q: lean—both the cough-syrup based drug and the aesthetic that mimics its slowed-down effects—is a way hip hop artists and fans cope with both the “requirement of black everyday life where maintaining success requires that you work nonstop” and “the national epidemic whereby black people are routinely killed whether they are working or not” (Adeyemi 2015). As Adeyemi explains, the drug and the aesthetics that mimic its effects help users/listeners experience an “alternative body-space-time continuum that converses with the demands the neoliberal state places on the black body” (Adeyemi 2015). Similarly, L. H. Stallings argues that the “ratchet” aesthetics found in both rap music and hip hop dance are a “postwork imagination and antiwork activit[y]” (Stallings 2015, 137). Work is a gendered, racialized private-property relation; for example, the Fordist work regime relied on and aimed to reproduce the white patriarchal nuclear family. Because capitalist work relations require the performance of specific racialized gender identities, alternative gender performances can create postwork and antiwork practices. Thus, as Stallings argues,

The strip club genre and the hip hop strip club also develop as a result of the unacknowledged presence of black women with various gender performances and sexual identities within the club, on stage and off, whose bodies and actions elicit new performances of black masculinity. Moreover, when woman is undone in this way, we note the potential for such undoing to temporarily queer men. (Stallings 2015, 138)

Though the hip hop strip club may appear to exhibit a very traditional patriarchal dynamic organized by the male gaze, what’s actually happening, according to Stallings (2015), is the performance of queered genders and queered gender relations. The dancers’ choreography is part of a tradition of “corporeal orature” (Stallings 2013, 138) that scripts gender and sexual performances outside the bounds of white Western gender binaries and is grounded in “the black ratchet imagination” (Stallings 2013, 136). So, though people unfamiliar with working-class black aesthetics might easily misinterpret the dancers at hip hop strip clubs as women performing for the male gaze, Stallings suggests that’s not what is actually going on. Rather, the black ratchet aesthetics informing both the dancers and the rap music inspired by and made to accompany it lead the people in the club to perform gender and sexual identities beyond the limits of cisheteronormative masculinity and femininity. In this way, the aesthetics of some kinds of rap music and hip hop dance provide ways to experience ourselves and our relations to other people outside the framework of what Kathi Weeks calls “work society” (Weeks 2011). Such postwork and antiwork aesthetics are a good reminder that as we strategize against precaritization, the ultimate aim is not the full inclusion of women in work but the abolition of work, of a world ordered by patriarchal, white supremacist work regimes.

TRANS STUDIES

Postfeminism and popular feminism are two contemporary examples of phenomena that are feminist in name but patriarchal in effect. Trans-exclusionary radical feminism (TERF) is another. The contemporary version of this kind of so-called feminism arose in the 2010s, responding, on the one hand, to the growing visibility of trans people in popular culture and political life and, on the other, to the birth of trans studies as a field distinct from feminism and queer studies. Though trans-exclusionary feminism has made less of an impact (so far) on music scholarship than it has on other disciplines (such as philosophy),¹¹ it has had a significant effect on musicians, fans, and the music industry. For example, scholarship in trans studies frequently cites

the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival as a paradigmatic case of trans-exclusionary feminism. Prior to the postmillennial trans bathroom panic (Grant 2016), the festival's policy of excluding trans women was one of the most well-known and spectacular cases of trans-exclusionary feminism, and music scholars such as Shana Goldin-Perschbacher (2013) and Elizabeth Keenan (2009) have written about the exclusionary politics of women's and feminist music spaces.

Music scholarship is also a part of the field of trans studies. Though there is a decades-long history of work by trans scholars on trans issues, trans studies fully established itself as a field in the 2010s, e.g., with the founding of *TSQ: Trans Studies Quarterly* and the 2013 publication of the Trans/Queer special issue of *JPMS*.¹² Just as much of the early scholarship in women and gender studies focused on recovering the work of artists written out of scholarly archives and giving adequate attention to living women artists, a significant amount of scholarship in trans studies has sought to draw attention to historical trans and gender-non-conforming musicians and living trans and non-binary/genderqueer (nb/gq) artists and scenes.¹³

Because voice is a sonic phenomenon that is gendered, it has been a frequent focus of trans feminist music scholarship. For example, scholars such as Stephan Pennington (2019) and Alexandros Constansis (2008) have studied the vocal techniques that some trans singers use to alter their voice. Referencing both the program he used to protect his singing voice during his medical transition and a small study he did of other FTM (female-to-male) singers who have gone through such a transition, Constansis's "The Changing Female-To-Male Voice" is a largely technical piece explaining how FTM singers can preserve the quality of their singing voices as hormone therapy reshapes their vocal chords (Constansis 2008).¹⁴ Despite its technical focus, Constansis's article makes valuable contributions to trans theory generally: although the rapid, intensive hormone treatments typically given to medically transitioning men accelerate visual masculinization, this hormone regimen actually impedes vocal masculinization because it forces the vocal chords to grow and harden faster than both these tissues and other parts of the voice box can tolerate. This raises questions about the best medical regimen for medically transitioning men and also about the privileged role that the visual plays in gender norms—both in general and in relation to trans people in particular. Pennington begins by identifying and cataloging techniques trans people use to alter their voice and uses this study to reflect on gender politics more generally. He shows how cis and non-trans singers use such techniques to pass as a different gender, make themselves audible as queer, and pass as their own gender. Other scholars have critiqued the cis appropriation of trans voices, such as in Beyoncé's "Formation," which features samples of the voice of trans artist Big Freedia (Declune 2017). Music and sound studies scholarship also influences how trans studies researchers use and analyze voice. Traditionally, voice has been used as a metaphor for personhood and its components like agency; scholarship that studied metaphorical trans voices were analyses of trans people's access (or lack of) access to personhood. Andrew Anastasis argues that trans studies scholars also need to "listen, like musicians, to the voice qua voice" and study the sonic, "acoustic" (Anastasia 2014, 262) manifestations of trans voices. Though Anastasia focuses on the revolutionary potential of trans voices, it is also important to note that voice is a common "tell" for trans and nb/gq people who otherwise pass as cis, and that using their voices can make non-cis people vulnerable to violence and other forms of oppression.¹⁵

One of the primary points of contention in contemporary trans feminist music scholarship is the role of matter and materiality in trans experience and trans methodology. Aligning herself with feminist new materialist theorists such as Karen Barad (Baitz 2019, 8), Dana Baitz argues that trans methods in music and musicology emphasize materiality—especially corporeal materiality—over textuality and discourse, which supposedly preoccupied 1990s queer feminist scholarship: "Rather than transcending bodily sex (by highlighting psychic affiliations and discursive fields), transsexuality is associated with investing in the body. Sexual signifiers that cannot be psychically incorporated are not subverted or recoded—they are physically changed" (Baitz 2019, 6). So, according to Baitz, the thing that distinguishes contemporary trans musicological methods from more established queer ones is their emphasis on materiality over discursivity. Baitz acknowledges that queer

frameworks are frequently used to study trans musicians, and advocates instead for the necessity of specifically trans methodologies.

Where Baitz emphasizes the importance of coherent embodied materiality in trans musicological methods, L. H. Stallings's study of black feminist transaesthetics argues instead for the centrality of the metaphysical to Black concepts and experiences of gender, such as the idea of

Illusive flesh...[which] serves as a counterphilosophy to embodiment about what the transaesthetic experience and representation of Otherly human bodies means to forms of life and being that exceed the biological. With black political traditions incapable of challenging the assumed materiality of sex and gender in the West, these discursive practices join Yoruba-influenced spirituality in the United States as black traditions willing to theorize illusive flesh as a form of metaphysical gender, less attached to the notion of a unified body. (Stallings 2015, 206)

Here, Stallings builds on black feminist philosophies of gender, such as Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí Oyèwùmí's *The Invention of Women* (1997), which argues that Western philosophy is somatacentric in a way that some African philosophies, such as that of the Yoruba, are not. According to Oyèwùmí, Western philosophy has historically treated the body as the basis of personal and social identity, and this somatacentrism grounds contemporary Western understandings of gender. Because traditional Yoruba philosophy does not use body-based categories as the foundation of personal and social identity, it can serve, Stallings argues, as a lens for alternative concepts and practices of gender that prioritize black culture and experience. Drawing on Hortense Spiller's concept of "flesh" (Spillers 1987), Stallings emphasizes the importance of such recentring and shows how the white supremacist racialization of Black people as black constructs them not as bodies, which belong to legal and moral persons (i.e., white people or "humans") but as flesh (i.e., non-persons). In other words, Western concepts of the body frame it as the material, physiological dimension of personhood, and because white supremacy denies full personhood to Black people, the material, physiological dimension of their existence is framed not as bodies at all but merely as flesh. As C. Riley Snorton emphasizes, Black people's lived experience of and legibility to white people as flesh is central to the ways Black trans people have understood and practiced their genders (Snorton 2017). For reasons such as these, the black feminist transaesthetics Stallings identifies in funk poetics begin from the assumption that gender is "metaphysical" and "exceed[s] the biological" (Stallings 2015, 104). This is perhaps why many of the musicians in Baitz's list of trans artists studied through queer/discursive frameworks, which treat gender as something more than just physiological, are black (e.g., Big Freedia, Mykki Blanco, and Foxxjazzell).¹⁶ So, on one level there is a lack of consensus within trans studies scholarship about the role of materiality in trans methodologies.

However, on another level this is more than just a disagreement about method or object of study. The conflict about materiality is an iteration of the ongoing political struggle over white supremacy and anti-blackness in feminist scholarship and activism. This lack of consensus intersects with trans studies' longstanding debate about the centrality of medical transition in trans scholarship and activism: because "medicalised understandings of gender" are "culturally inappropriate" (Roen 2001, 253) for many non-white, non-Western people, and because white people have greater financial and institutional access to medical transition, centering medical transition effectively centers whiteness, just as centering materiality does. It is essential that feminisms not take white people's experiences of gender and cisheteropatriarchy as universally representative and that feminist theories don't focus on white feminist theorists to the exclusion of non-white scholars, artists, and activists.¹⁷ As trans studies and trans musicology grow as fields, it is important that we guard against reproducing the same flaws that continue to plague white feminisms.

Stefan Pennington's article on black trans/masculinities is an example of work that is attentive to intersectionality in general and the intersectionality of blackness and transness in particular (2018). It is also notable

for its attention to the way its subject, singer Willmer Broadnax, used musical techniques to intercede in the performances of trans masculinities common in the postwar era, which participated in the wider context of “traditional white-constructed misogynistic hypermasculinity that was naturalized in the 1950s” (Pennington 2018, 121) by cis men. Broadnax was a gospel vocalist who generally performed in a group or quartet context singing a very high tenor and often using vocal performance conventions pioneered by and commonly associated with women. Although such sonic femininity might otherwise call Broadnax’s masculinity into question, high tenor vocal virtuosity was, in the context of the gospel quartet, normalized as an aesthetic. As Pennington argues, “Broadnax’s high tenor voice and adoption of female gospel vocal techniques confounds hegemonic narratives of transmasculine (and cis masculine) performance, as well as the limits of what black men can be and the relationships they can have with black women” (Pennington 2018, 125). This specific aesthetic allowed Broadnax to perform a masculinity that wasn’t predicated on the abjection of the feminine without having that masculinity immediately called into question: although his voice did not meet “sonic patriarchy’s” norms about men’s voices (Lentjes 2018b), it did fit the norms for men’s voices in the context of this specific subgenre of music. Pennington’s study illustrates both how sonic white supremacist capitalist cisheteropatriarchy structures not just our perception of voices but the aesthetics of music, and how trans musicians have used such aesthetics to negotiate less oppressive ways of relating to one another.

GENDER AND TECHNOLOGY

Western culture has a habit of expressing its conflicting hopes and fears of new technologies in terms of its similarly conflicted view of women’s sexuality, which gender studies scholars call the “virgin/whore dichotomy.” The virgin/whore dichotomy is a racialized double standard applied to women, whom patriarchal attitudes perceive as both desirable (to the extent they are white) and threatening (to the extent they are not white). Because new technologies often elicit these same conflicted feelings, when films such as *Metropolis* and *Her* represent advanced technologies like robots and artificial intelligence as women, patriarchal attitudes toward women also function as expressions of societal attitudes toward new technologies. Music scholars have used this analytic to discuss responses to technologies such as the vocal processing software Auto-Tune and the police siren. For example, Alexander Rehding argues that throughout its history, attitudes to the latter “mirror the original pairing of danger and ecstasy, and the immediate effects of these sounds on the body, which characterized the ancient siren song” (Rehding 2014, 107). With regard to the former, I have argued that the figure of the black “robo-diva” functions as the “intersection of white patriarchy’s anxieties about both black female sexuality and technology” (James 2008, 218). So, while patriarchy evolves with advancing technologies, it also shapes how those advances proceed and how we think, feel, and interact with those advances. In the twenty-first century, rapidly evolving digital technologies and cultures affect both how music is made and heard, and how patriarchy works. I’ve already addressed the last point a little in the discussion of popular feminism: social media and its attendant internet cultures created economies of visibility or spectacle that drove both developments in patriarchy and in feminism. In this section, I address how algorithmic systems impact both gender classification and the music industry, and I also discuss twenty-first century cyborg and cyberfeminist approaches to music.

GENDER AND ALGORITHMIC SYSTEMS IN MUSIC

Advances in both algorithms and the computers that crunch those numbers—what Nick Seaver calls “algorithmic systems” (Seaver 2017)—have led to parallel innovations in the kinds of abstractions we use to study and represent both genders and musics. In other words, there have been changes to both the kinds of categories we use to divide genders and musics into groups and what we take into account while categorizing. Media

studies scholar John Cheney-Lippold has shown how psychometric classification changes both how individuals' gender is identified and what kind of category gender is (Cheney-Lippold 2011). Traditionally, gender has been identified on the basis of perceptible outward appearance (Alcoff 2005). As Talia Bettcher argues, "gender presentation (attire, in particular) constitutes a gendered appearance" (Bettcher 2017, 48) that is then taken as a representation of the body's anatomical sex; this logic allows trans people to be accused of deception because their appearance is not understood as an accurate signifier of the supposedly underlying anatomical reality of their bodies. Where outward appearance is traditionally the basis on which gender identity is inferred, the algorithmic systems commonly used by corporations and the state infer gender identity on the basis of behavior. As Cheney-Lippold puts it, "these computer algorithms have the capacity to infer categories of identity upon users based largely on their web-surfing habits...using computer code, statistics, and surveillance to construct categories within populations according to users' surveilled internet history" (Cheney-Lippold 2011, 164). Spotify's and Amazon's recommendation algorithms are judging my clicks, not my appearance. They pay attention to what I *do*, not how I look. At first glance, this may seem less oppressive than the traditional logic of gender identification: instead of judging what you look like, which you don't have a lot of control over, these algorithms judge your behavior, something over which you have purportedly complete control. However, this is just another way of masking intensified patriarchal racial capitalism behind the veneer of its abolition. Because we all exist and make choices about what to do in a world thoroughly structured by white supremacist capitalist patriarchy, the kinds of choices we can make are determined by our position within these intersecting systems of domination. Thus, although these algorithmic systems appear to only judge behavior, the situatedness of behaviors allows traditional identity logics to be imported in the back door.

This is not the only way algorithmic identity pretends to be more liberatory than it actually is. Because of the capacities algorithmic systems have for refining categories based on the success of past uses of those categories, they may seem to fix any problems with identity essentialism. As Cheney-Lippold explains, "a gender algorithm can name X as male, [but] it can also develop what 'male' may come to be defined as online" (Cheney-Lippold 2011, 167). As a category, *maleness* thus includes whatever behaviors are statistically correlated with reliably identified *male* profiles: *maleness* is whatever *males* do. This is a circular definition, and that's a feature not a bug. "Algorithms allow a shift to a more flexible and functional definition of the category, one that de-essentializes gender from its corporeal and societal forms and determinations" (Cheney-Lippold 2011, 170). Algorithmic gender isn't essentialist because gender categories have no necessary properties and are constantly open to reinterpretation. An identity is a feedback loop of mutual renegotiation between the category and individual instances. So, as long as an individual is sufficiently (statistically) masculine or feminine in their online behavior, they are that gender—regardless, for example, of their meatspace gender. As long as the data you generate falls into recognizably *male* or *female* patterns, then you are assigned that gender role. Because gender is de-essentialized, it seems like it is rooted in an individual performance and not a biologically determined fact. But remember, neoliberalism papers over systemic social inequality by attributing those inequities to individuals' differing levels of performance—all choices are made by individuals variously situated with respect to patriarchal racial capitalism, and their choices reflect the affordances and limitations of their situations. So although algorithmic systems may change how an individual's gender is identified and what gender categories are in the first place, these changes aren't usually for the better. There is an extensive and growing literature on how algorithmic systems make structural domination worse (e.g., Mackenzie 2017; Noble 2018).

These shifts in gender categories and categorization impact feminist music scholarship, not only because they have something to do with gender but also because these same technologies are used to classify and categorize music. For example, psychometric analysis in music streaming is collapsing the traditional relationship between format (which describes demographic relations among people, e.g., men ages 18–34) and genre (which describes artistic and aesthetic features of a scene) (James 2017b).¹⁸ When streaming services use aggregated individual listener behavior (clicks and skips, for example) to help them refine both their categorization algorithms and

their classifications of individual songs, they are transducing information about songs directly from information about people. And because psychometrics use behavior as a proxy to measure relations that are shaped by individuals' experiences of privilege and/or oppression within patriarchal racial capitalism, psychometric categories and rankings are thoroughly shaped by this system of intersecting oppressions. This is why, as Liz Pelly (2018) argues, Spotify's recommendation algorithm "effectively reproduces gender bias" with a "slight intensification of said bias" from their popularity-ranked playlists, such as Rap Caviar, which, as Pelly notes, are still largely dominated by men. Because streaming numbers factor into pop charts, streaming's gender bias contributes to the marginalization of non-men artists across the music industry specifically and in pop culture generally. The technology may be advancing, but these advances are making sexism, racism, and the like *worse*.

CYBORG AND CYBER FEMINISMS

Though cyborg and cyber feminisms date to the 1980s and 1990s (e.g., with Donna Haraway's 1984 *The Cyborg Manifesto* or Sadie Plant's 1997 *Zeroes and Ones*), they have evolved as twenty-first century technologies, feminisms, and patriarchies evolve. For example, the collective Laboria Cuboniks has updated Plant's CCRU-inflected cyberfeminism to account for twenty-first century digital and biotechnologies (Laboria Cuboniks 2018; Hester 2018).¹⁹ Laboria Cuboniks (2018) called this new, accelerationist-adjacent cyberfeminism "xenofeminism" to emphasize their view that technology's liberatory potential lies in its ability to "generate new worlds" and intensify our experiences of "alienation" from nature (*xeno* is the ancient Greek word for "foreign" or "alien"). However, as feminists such as scholar-artist Annie Goh have pointed out, xenofeminism features some of the commonly problematic aspects of white feminism (Goh 2019). The best cyborg and cyberfeminisms begin from the understanding that the category *human* is normatively white, cisheteromasculine, able-bodied, and otherwise privileged by patriarchal racial capitalism and use the figure of the cyborg and cybernetic or digital technologies to imagine identities and socialities that are other than *human* and make life more livable and pleasurable for those conventionally considered sub- or non-human. Here I want to briefly review several such approaches in music scholarship, all of which foreground race in their approaches to feminism, gender, and technology.

Nina Sun Eidsheim's study of vocaloids—voice synthesizer software—foregrounds the fact that audiences apply human identity categories to digitally-generated voices (Eidsheim 2019). Unlike vocoders or Auto-Tune, which modify vocal inputs from a human singer, vocaloids are synthetic voices generated from software. Though they can sometimes be inspired by a specific singer's voice, the software doesn't require someone to input a vocal track to then be processed; instead, it generates the vocal track from code, much like any other VST (virtual synthesizer). Studying the various reactions audiences had to early vocaloids LEON and LOLA, and to more recent ones like RUBY and Hatsune Miku, Eidsheim finds that rather than resisting or undoing white supremacist patriarchal norms regarding voice, identity, and embodiment, "vocaloid voices and the visual creations related to those voices reify the common misperceptions that race is essentially expressed through the body and that this racialized body is audible through vocal timbre" (Eidsheim 2019, 147–148). For example, when the Latinx performer who inspired the voice and image of RUBY expressed dissatisfaction with the way the animated image of her vocaloid's character was whitewashed, fans created a proliferation of fan art that represented her with both a browner skin tone and a more Latinx sartorial style. Thus, Eidsheim concludes, "when the alignment of visual and textual representation seems wrong, the listener creates the context to re-present an alignment that satisfies his or her expectation. The success of this logic rehabilitates the idea of essentialized voice from being a myth and reinstates a new status quo" (Eidsheim 2019, 148). In other words, the imperative to perceive vocal timbre as a sign of race and gender identity is so strong that we require computer software (which doesn't have a wetware body) exhibit the same voice-to-body correspondences that we demand of actual wetware bodies. So rather than liberate us from the white supremacist capitalist patriarchal policing of voices and bodies, vocaloids

have been taken up in ways that reinforce such policing.

Scholars in Black sound studies have identified various overlapping ways artists and audiences use technologies to create ways of being and relating that exceed the white supremacist patriarchal logics of *the human*. Here, I will review this topic briefly, as I have discussed it in great detail elsewhere (James 2018a; 2018b; 2019b). Scholars such as Crawley, Denise Ferreria da Silva, and McKittrick and Weheliye analyze artworks and pop culture practices for what da Silva calls “poethical (material and compositional)” content (da Silva 2017). According to da Silva, the ideas and methods the Western academy and artworld have developed for thinking and talking about art are grounded in white supremacist ontologies, metaphysics, epistemologies, and aesthetics; the “poethical” is da Silva’s term for poetic—i.e., formal, compositional, technical, craftpersonly, sensory—features of artworks that establish anti-white supremacist and decolonial frameworks for, and methods of, thinking. Though we are still living in a world fundamentally shaped by patriarchal racial capitalism, artworks can imagine, depict, and represent presently counterfactual realities organized by non-colonial and non-white supremacist rationalities. For example, artworks create poethical methods and ideas when the ways they are put together—their aesthetics and poetics—model ontologies and relationalities that “recod[e]” (da Silva 2017) things like the norms that vocaloid producers and fans use to re-discipline voices to fit white supremacist capitalist patriarchal codes.²⁰ Similarly, McKittrick and Weheliye (2017) argue that “one way to understand Black culture’s relationship to technology is through the way that especially Black music/sound...mak[es technologies] usable in heretofore nonexistent modalities,” such as the way early hip hop DJs transformed turntables from devices for consuming music to ones for producing it. Abstracting those rationalities from the aesthetics and poetics of such artworks, we can use them to think and theorize more broadly. This transformation in the use of turntables created “otherwise” (Crawley 2017, 2) cultures and aesthetics that allowed people to find pleasure and community amid intensifying patriarchal racial capitalist domination. So even though new digital technologies and some of the feminist theories that have been developed to go along with them can intensify rather than remedy patriarchal domination, we can learn from technologies and theories that practice such otherwise ways of thinking, feeling, and relating.

SEXUAL ASSAULT AND HARASSMENT

The final major issue that crosses both academic and extra-academic feminisms is the renewed attention to workplace sexual assault and harassment that arose in the wake of the *New York Times*’s explosive exposé of film producer Harvey Weinstein. Shelley Cobb and Tanya Horeck call this the “Weinstein effect” (2018, 489). It is often referred to as #MeToo, after the hashtag built on the term coined by Tarana Burke but only publicly credited to her after the hashtag was launched in the wake of the Weinstein effect.

Insofar as this moment is one where “the media spotlight is trained on sexual harassment and abuse in the workplace” (Cobb and Horeck 2018, 489), the Weinstein effect and #MeToo have tended to manifest as forms of popular feminism—that is, as highly mediatized movements that center white cis women and adopt a liberal feminist focus on individual women as economic agents (James forthcoming). As Cobb and Horeck (2018) argue, “despite the inclusionary rhetoric around #MeToo, the question of race is a ‘constitutive omission’ in public conversations on gender, power, harassment, and assault” (490), which has tended to “focu[s] on privileged white, attractive female music superstars” (Baker et al. 2019). For example, Taylor Swift was the only musician or music industry professional named among *Time Magazine*’s “Silence Breakers” in their 2017 “Person of the Year” feature (Zachareck et al. 2017).

While white cishetero women tend to be overrepresented in media accounts of workplace sexual assault and harassment, non-white women are disproportionately at risk. McKittrick and Weheliye build on Ruth Wilson Gilmore’s (2007) definition of racism to argue for “ways to think about racism as not only being engulfed by

increased ‘group-differentiated vulnerabilities to premature death,’ [Gilmore 2007, 261] but also the extreme susceptibility to many different forms of sexual violence and violation” (McKittrick and Weheliye 2017, 16). Non-white people are disproportionately at risk of sexual assault and harassment yet receive the least attention from the media and the music industry. For this reason, I will focus my discussion here on music scholarship and criticism about sexual assault and harassment that foregrounds race.²¹

The media’s handling of sexual assault allegations against R&B singer R. Kelly reveals one key way white supremacy shapes both the music industry’s and fans’ approach to these issues. *Chicago Sun-Times* music critic Jim DeRogatis first reported credible allegations that Kelly repeatedly raped underage black girls in 2000. Public outrage remained muted, even as Kelly was tried for child pornography in 2008 and later went on to headline the 2012 Pitchfork Festival in Chicago. As Jessica Hopper reported in 2013, Kelly “has gotten a pass from music publications (not to mention feminist sites such as Jezebel)” (Hopper 2013). And that pass continued largely unchallenged until producer dream hampton’s TV miniseries “Surviving R. Kelly” aired in early 2019. Why did it take nearly *twenty years* for the court of public opinion to hold Kelly accountable for repeated child rape? As DeRogatis put it in his interview with Hopper, “The saddest fact I’ve learned is that nobody matters less to our society than young black women. *Nobody*” (Hopper 2013). Kelly’s case exemplifies how the media, the music industry, and fans attitudes to sexual assault and harassment are shaped by misogynoir and white supremacy: public outrage at the rape of black women and girls is comparatively limited because white supremacist patriarchy positions black women and girls as non-persons—that is, as not entitled to grant consent before others can access the sexual property in their bodies (Pateman and Mills 2007; McKittrick and Weheliye 2017; Weheliye 2014). Though Kelly is now largely *persona non grata* in the music industry (e.g., his label and his publisher removed him from their official rosters; Wang 2019), the fact that it took an international movement focused on workplace sexual harassment of famous white women for the press, the industry, and the public to pay concerted attention to Kelly’s case shows just how much white supremacist patriarchy continues to shape what many consider to be a feminist cause.

While the media’s, the music industry’s, and music fans’ recent attention to sexual assault and harassment has deprioritized the victimization of black women and girls, they tend to disproportionately emphasize cases where black men are the perpetrators. As bell hooks wrote in 1994, mainstream white media hand-wringing over misogynist lyrics in “gangsta rap” scapegoated black men for patriarchal society’s underlying misogyny: “Young black males are forced to take the heat for encouraging via their music the hatred and violence against women that is a central core of patriarchy” (hooks 1994, 136). Because the media tends to ignore cases where black women and girls are the victims of abuse and assault, it is especially notable that they tend to pay more attention when the assailant is also black. For example, Chris Brown physically assaulted his then-girlfriend Rihanna in 2009, and public outcry was so great that most reviews of her subsequently-released album *Unapologetic* could only interpret her work through the lens of that assault, even though this was not a theme addressed anywhere in the album (James 2015). Far from ignoring Brown’s assault against Rihanna, critics and fans couldn’t seem to get over it. While the public doesn’t care enough when black women are victims of sexual assault and relationship violence, they care too much when black men are the perpetrators. This paradox illustrates how crucial it is to approach issues of sexual assault and harassment with an intersectional lens that foregrounds race.

Though the Western art music canon is largely white, there are still ways it can be studied and performed that pay attention to the racialized dimensions of sexual assault and harassment. For example, Monica Hershberger’s 2018 article “Seduction or Rape? The Sexual Politics of Carlisle Floyd’s *Susannah*” focuses on the constructions of racial blackness in opera. Studying the various ways scholars and critics have described the titular character’s sexual assault, Hershberger argues that uses of the term “seduction”—which historically and legally referred only to white women—obscure the “musical and textual evidence to support a reading of *Susannah* as an African American woman” (Hershberger 2018, 229). This evidence constitutes a subtext, and “this subtext makes *Susannah* an ideal vehicle for a frank conversation about the history of rape in the United States—including that

history's entanglement with American notions of race" (Hershberger 2018, 231). According to Hershberger, *Susannah* highlights the way that norms and laws delegitimize black women's rape claims by representing them as sub-persons from whom consent is unnecessary. Hershberger's conclusions echo DeRogatis's reading of the R. Kelly case, and taking the two together shows that the worlds of art music and popular music are each structured by the same fundamental political rationalities (such as white supremacist capitalist patriarchy) and that feminist alliances across the fine art/pop culture divide are both possible and potentially productive.

The renewed attention to endemic sexual assault and harassment in music institutions and industries has also revived interest in the question of what to do with beloved music by abusive composers, songwriters, and performers. After the *Leaving Neverland* documentary aired, *Slate* ran a series titled "Michael Jackson: The Reckoning," in which music critics and scholars wrestled with the political, moral, and aesthetic issues raised by Jackson's alleged serial child rape. Jason King's contribution to the series addresses the way the film traffics in "racial spectacle—two white men trashing the reputation of a black man—and then refuses to grapple with that spectacle's historical dimensions" (King 2019). Carl Wilson's (2019) piece focuses directly on the debate about whether to "cancel" Jackson's music and musical legacy. Arguing that "Michael Jackson won't disappear" (2019), Wilson points out that it's impossible to eliminate Jackson's influence on pop music: cancelling him would snowball into the widespread cancelling of artists influenced by his work, from Bruno Mars to Beyoncé and beyond.

Because Jackson's work has so deeply and extensively shaped—and continues to shape—the last half-century of popular music, this leaves listeners with little choice but to, as NPR music critic Ann Powers put it, "stay... in an uncomfortable place" (Powers 2019). McKittrick and Weheliye call this uncomfortableness *heart/////break* (2017, 2). They use the term to "captur[e], at least a little, those injuriously loving emulations of what it means to be Black and human within the context of white supremacy" (McKittrick and Weheliye 2017, 14). With the repeated forward slashes making space between the term's two syllables, *heart/////break* emphasizes the doubleness with which black people experience aesthetic pleasure under white supremacist patriarchy: on the one hand, over centuries white supremacist patriarchy has become coded into aesthetic norms, values, and practices that make it impossible to avoid; on the other hand, black musicians and audiences have nevertheless produced artworks and experiences that people find pleasurable and even healing. They take the approach of Rihanna (Robyn Fenty's stage name) to Chris Brown as an example of *heart/////break*:

She sits with and lives on and with the heartbreak, moving on but never completely leaving the scene....Over the years Fenty has emphasized both her own heartbreak and her heartbreak over the way Brown, someone she loved, was rendered monstrous by the mainstream media. (2017, 23)

White supremacy—in this example, the media's racist treatment of Brown, which I discussed above—makes it impossible to clearly put people into clear-cut victim and aggressor boxes. Brown, for example, was both Rihanna's aggressor and the racist media's victim. It is a basic—yet often overlooked—premise of intersectionality theory that someone can be differentially situated with respect to various forms of privilege or domination (Nash 2008). Using a poetics that simultaneously connects and creates space between positive and negative feelings, McKittrick and Weheliye's concept of *heart/////break* models an approach to the issue of what to do about important artworks by abusive creators that accurately accounts for both intersectionality and the way white supremacist capitalist patriarchy structures aesthetic norms and artistic traditions.

Although some scholarship takes race and white supremacy as fundamental to both rape culture and critiques of it, music scholarship on this issue could do a better job of accounting for the experiences of trans and non-binary people and recognize the possibility that perpetrators and victims would be anything except cisgendered and heterosexual. Activists and critics working outside the academy have been more inclusive on this issue.

For example, Ian Good, Catherine Hilgers, and Benjamin Inch's 2013 zine "Rave Ethics" features guides about how to party without assaulting or harassing women and non-binary people, as well as images of non-cis nudes. Clubs have also developed policies that explicitly address sexual assault and harassment in broadly inclusive ways. For example, the ground rules New York City techno club BASEMENT lists on their website state that "Consent is mandatory. Zero tolerance for racism, homophobia, transphobia, sexism, ableism, or any form of discrimination" (BASEMENT n.d.). Putting a long list of specific forms of oppression after a broadly-framed notion of consent, the BASEMENT statement captures the fact that sexual assault and harassment is a power dynamic inherent in all the intersecting forms of oppression they list.

As new events such as COVID-19 and the worldwide protests against police brutality capture the attention of the media, funding bodies, scholars, and students, it is unclear if this recent surge of scholarly and activist interest in sexual assault and harassment will continue unabated or if it will wane in the face of shifting priorities. There are, however, ways to approach issues such as police and prison abolition through the lens of sexual assault and harassment. For example, the activist collective Survived + Punished advocates against the criminalization of assault and abuse victims who take action against their abusers. As they argue on their website,

nearly 60% of people in women's prison nationwide, and as many as 94% of some women's prison populations, have a history of physical or sexual abuse before being incarcerated. Once incarcerated or detained, many women (including trans women) and trans & gender non-conforming people experience sexual violence from guards and others. (Survived + Punished 2016)

From this perspective, sexual assault and harassment is not a separate issue from police and prison abolition: for women and non-binary people, there is a feedback loop between being sexually assaulted or abused and being incarcerated. This is just one possible avenue for future research on the issue of sexual assault and harassment that incorporates new and emerging issues of public urgency.

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In this article, I've chosen to highlight issues that impact the fundamental elements of feminist music scholarship: what feminism is, how gender is perceived and classified, the working conditions of women music writers and musicians, and so on. These issues have broad reach and are crucial for a vast variety of feminisms, feminists, musics, and musicians. I offer this article not as a comprehensive concordance of current research but as a tool that scholars can use in their own projects, whatever sorts of musics and feminisms are involved.

Such tools are crucial as musicians, scholars, and activists navigate the impacts of the situations we face today such as the global pandemic and worldwide Black Lives Matter protests against racial injustice. For example, as scholars, academic departments, and scholarly societies respond to Danielle Brown's (2020) "An Open Letter on Racism in Music Studies," which was widely circulated in the summer of 2020, it will be important to avoid limiting discourse and actions to what we might call *popular anti-racism*, the antiracist analog of popular feminism.²² As both the music industry and the academy are roiled by the economic impacts of COVID-19, we must be prepared to oppose new waves of austerity and precaritization. Relatedly, as instruction, conferences, and music performances move online amid social distancing measures, how can we use technologies in ways that avoid replicating and intensifying white supremacist capitalist patriarchal inequities? These are just some examples of ways the ideas I discuss here can be used to analyze new and urgent questions facing musicians, scholars, and activists; I hope my readers find many more ways to do so.

I conclude with a caution. Even though we are living in a time when unprecedented change feels increasingly like the daily precedent, white supremacist capitalist patriarchy is remarkably resilient and has a history of

adapting new and varied tools to achieve its same old unjust ends, including co-opted and neutralized feminisms. However, we are fortunate that making, listening to, and talking about music have historically been activities where people experiment with and forge types of relationships that open out possibilities for greater justice. Angela Davis, for example, makes the Marcusean argument that “the aesthetic distance achieved through music forges a consciousness that imagines community among the people who share glimpses of the possibility of eventually moving beyond oppression” (1998, 111). In other words, music can (though it doesn’t inherently or necessarily) create the context where people can practice how and experience what it feels like to relate to one another in less oppressive ways because those relationships aren’t beholden to the fact of ongoing white supremacist capitalist patriarchy (i.e., they have “aesthetic distance” from factual reality). Davis thinks this is an important way that art can be political and do political work. It’s a useful guide for feminist musicians and music scholars as we tackle new and ongoing challenges and ask how the music we make, listen to, and talk about—and our making, listening, and talking—can help ourselves, our students, and our audiences practice more just ways of doing, being, and thinking.

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NOTES

1. I mean “liberal” in the technical sense used by political philosophers to refer to social contract theory, classical liberalism, or neoliberal upgrades to the classical model. Liberalism is defined by its commitments to individualism, autonomy, formal equality before the law, and private property. In the seventeenth century, these commitments were the opposite of then-conservative positions regarding monarchical sovereignty. By the twenty-first century, liberalism and its commitments are actually conservative positions vis-a-vis more progressive commitments to material equality, collectivity and relationality, the abolition of private property, and social justice.

2. On the relationship between personhood as private property and women’s dispossession of their personhood and their bodies, see Federici (2004) and Pateman (1988).

3. The frequency of *feminism* or *feminist* in article titles in *Women and Music* drops in the first two decades of the century. The discipline’s main feminist journal, *Women and Music*, has no articles with *feminism* or *feminist* in the title in the 2017 volume but two in the 2016 volume. The term appeared fairly regularly throughout the 2010s, most often in the work of one scholar, Elizabeth Keenan (Keenan 2010, 2015). If *feminism* is taboo even in the discipline’s feminist journal—it’s published by the same society that runs the “Feminist Theory & Music” conference—then postfeminism must have hit music scholarship quite hard after the rise of feminist musicology the decade before.

4. For articles arguing that “Trap Queen” is a feminist song, see Amrita (2016), B. (2015), and Hope (2015).

5. The most commonly cited ur-poptimist text is Kelefa Sanneh’s 2004 *New York Times* article “The Rap Against Rockism.”

6. For more examples, see James (2015) and Lordi (2017).

7. For a contemporary discussion of enclosure that has been particularly influential, see Federici (2004).

8. For further analysis of Crawley, see James (2019).

9. Breitbart.com is an extreme right-wing website that advocates for white nationalism.

10. Examples of such feminisms are articulated in Simone de Beauvoir’s *Ethics of Ambiguity* (1948) and Sara Ahmed’s *Living A Feminist Life* (2017).

11. In 2018, there were organized attempts to both harass trans philosophers on Twitter and to have peer-reviewed trans feminist scholarship redacted from journals. See the discussions in Bettcher (2018) and Flaherty (2018). Additionally, one of the leading figures of academic trans-exclusionary feminism, Kathleen Stock, has published some work in the philosophy of music (Stock 2007).

12. The formalization of trans studies as a field has not been universally positive or progressive. Trans scholars and activists of color have argued that narratives of the field and its emergence have appropriated prior work by trans writers, artists, and activists of color, while others have argued that, like women's studies and queer studies before it, the institutionalization of trans studies has been possible only through the adoption of the academy's general commitments to whiteness and white supremacy. See, for example, Irving (2008).

13. See Altinay (2008), Barg (2014a, 2014b, 2017), Bard (2017), Biddle and Fouz-Hernández (2012), Born et al. (2017), Braga-Pinto (2002), Drake (2011), Goldin-Perschbacher (2007), Muñoz (2009), Namaste (2005), Pennington (2018), Royster (2013), Snorton (2013), and Välimäki (2017).

14. For more work on recent practices in trans voice pedagogy, see Cayari (2018).

15. I would like to thank my student Jordan Mix for emphasizing this point.

16. This more discursive or metaphysical approach to transness is not limited to black artists. For example, in an interview in *Transgender Studies Quarterly*, white trans performance artist Tobaron Waxman explains his practice in these terms: "Since 2000 my artistic projects have used my hair, body, and voice (as well as the symbolic connotations they inspire) as key creative and conceptual tools. My practice includes elements of Jewish and transgendered experience by incorporating text, vocals, and philosophy, as well as contemporary politics and desire" (Johnson 2014).

17. One underlying problem here is the attempt to think of *trans methods* as "categorically distinct" from, say, queer methods or methodologies in black studies. The notion of categorical distinction comes from Ashon Crawley, who I discussed above. Giving an analysis of philosophy that applies to other disciplines as well, Crawley writes, "Philosophy in general is divided up, it is produced through the capacity to make a claim that categorical distinction is not only possible, but that distinction can remain pure" (Crawley 2017, 115). Categorical distinctions are the stuff of the academy. However, as Crawley argues, such distinctions are the conceptual ground for the very idea of body as different from flesh: "the 'body'—through sex, through rhetoric—is a categorical coherence, it is a theological-philosophical concept of enclosure, a grammar and logic producing something like bodily integrity" (Crawley 2017, 59). Crawley's framework suggests that the project of a categorically distinct field of trans studies is conceptually tied to the idea of the body as such and all the normative whiteness it implies.

18. As Eric Weisbard (2014) explains, "the logic of formats celebrated the skillful matching of a set of songs with a set of people" (13), whereas "the logic of genres...celebrated the creative matching of a set of songs and a set of ideas" (14).

19. The CCRU (Cybernetic Culture Research Unit) at the University of Warwick was founded in 1995 and closed in the early 2000s. Its politics were uneven, ranging from Kodwo Eshun's Afrofuturism to twenty-first century writings by neo-fascist Nick Land. See for example Eshun's monograph *More Brilliant Than The Sun*.

20. For a longer discussion of this topic, see James (2018d).

21. Rihan Jones and Eli Davies's edited book *Under My Thumb: Songs That Hate Women and the Women Who Love Them* (2017) includes essays that take up race in different ways.

22. For examples of critiques of popular anti-racism, see Jackson (2013) and Kärkliņa (2020).

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